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—Presents—

OBSCURE CRIME BOOKS

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Over the years, as most of you have probably guessed, I've accumulated a large number of true crime books. My collection isn't definitive or complete, and university librarians aren't going to be courting my heirs for it when I die. (I expect they'll wind up donating it to a thrift store.) But I like it. I've reached one of my goals -- I can go into most used bookstores and walk out with no more than one or two TC books because I already have all the interesting ones. This is something that all you compulsive book buyers with both limited budgets and shelf space can appreciate.

After you've been in a few hundred used bookstores, you begin to see the pattern. The same titles pop up over and over again: Capote's *In Cold Blood,* Buligosi's *Helter Skelter*, the works of Anne Rule, and Jack Olsen, hack books by the usual suspects -- no used true crime section exists without them. These books went through dozens of hardcover editions, were picked up by major book clubs, and made the paperback bestseller lists. I call these, with no reflection on their literary merit, "thrift store books". They're so easy to find, you can, and should, wait until you find them for a quarter at the St. Vincent de Paul.

Somewhat less pervasive are "half-price" books. They pop up fairly consistently at used book stores (except when you're after a specific title!) and are the meat & potatoes of the dealer's trade. Obviously, they go for about half their original cover price. They can in turn be divided into two sub-categories: "half-price hardbacks" and "half-price paperbacks". And yes, the distinction goes beyond mere bindings. If it's a fairly common hardback from a major publisher, trust me. Sooner or later, it will be a "half-price paperback". Take note, those with cash and shelf constraints.

And finally, we come to our subject here, the "obscure books". An "obscure" book isn't necessarily rare. If I hardly ever see it in my hours misspent in used bookstores, it's obscure. It might be all over your town, it might come out in paperback tomorrow, but for my purposes, it's obscure.

Some of books here are really tough to find. You have copies of *The Love Murders of Harry F. Powers, The Sexual Criminal* and *The Murderous Trail of Charles Starkweather*? Congratulations. I hope you didn't have to mortgage anything to get them. I don't even want to discuss what I had to go through to find these, and what I had to pay when I did.

Some of the others, like *Chief* or *38 Witnesses* (and if you're from New Zealand, *Bad Blood*) aren't necessarily great rarities. When they do pop up, they have reasonable price tags. But you don't see them every day, which in my book earns them their "obscure" status. And of course, obscurity isn't permanent. Any day, some wise reprint publisher can resurrect any one of these titles. If it can happen to *The Cannibal*, *The Co-ed Killer*, and *Born To Raise Hell*, it can happen here.

So that's what an obscure crime book is. Now, why waste an entire issue of MCBF on them? Because I can. This is one of the fringe benefits of self-publishing.

But I do have other reasons. Every time I give a tough title one of my patented 100-word rundowns in a regular MCBF "Read Hard Or Die" column, people write. They want more information, they want pictures, they want the book itself. In a longer review, at least I can mix in a lot more info on the contents along with my usual snotty comments. Remember, sometimes you just have to be satisfied with a synopsis.

And then there's my integrity. I pick up a nifty, obscure book on an interesting crime (or, for that matter, a nifty, obscure book on a done-to-death crime). I read it, enjoy it, and want to write about it. But it's the only book ever written on the case. If I did the article, inevitably I'd wind up just summarizing the book. I consider this cheating -- even in elementary school, my teacher insisted that we use three sources minimum. Book reports, on the other hand, require only the reading of a single volume. Hence this book report format.

And I have to admit, there is the show-off factor. Half of the joy of ownership is lording over the less fortunate. Every time I have guests, these are some of the stars of the "books shows" I like to put on. It sure beats the slides from my last vacation.

And before anyone asks, I have no copies of any of the books described in here for sale, I haven't the foggiest idea who does, and I wish you best of luck.

As for MCBF #16, it is in the works. I've already accumulated quite a stack of clippings for the cover story, "Zoo Deaths". But, as always, I'm looking for more. Do you know of any kids who tried to play piggy-back with the polar bears in your local menagerie? Write. I'd <u>love</u> to hear <u>all</u> the details.

Murder Can Be Fun Presents: Obscure Crime Books is an outgrowth of Murder Can Be Fun, an erratically published fanzine on similar topics. A list of the many fine back issues available can be obtained from the above address, as can a sample copy for $1.50. And yes, there are generous discounts available for bulk purchasers. All material copyright 1994 by Mr. Marr, and may only be reprinted with (quite easily obtained) permission. Also, please be advised that MCBF is a duly registered trademark. Hands off! Kudos to the usual tolerant bunch this time, including DC, ME, SduP, R/S, PSers, and the others.

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LOVE MURDERS OF HARRY F. POWERS

by Evan Allen Bartlett
(New York: Sheftel Press, 1931)

Love Murders is an obscure crime book in every sense of the word. It was put out by a small New York City publisher that no one seems to have heard from before or since. And the subject, West Virginia serial killer Harry Powers, is virtually forgotten. His memory today survives only in a handful of brief, contradictory paragraphs in the most comprehensive serial murder compendiums, and the hearts of the few collectors lucky enough to own this book.

The sub-theme here is lonelyhearts. Today, the personal ad has lost virtually all social stigma. At worst, it's slightly embarrassing to admit meeting your girlfriend the same way you found your clunker motorcycle.

Things were different back in the '30s. Personal ads as we know them were nonexistent. Instead, there were only the lonelyhearts clubs selling address lists of presumably marriage (and otherwise) minded individuals waiting by their mailbox for the letter from that special someone. These clubs were seen as thoroughly sleazy and disreputable, if not downright dangerous. Women were routinely warned of the dangers seemingly innocent correspondence with lonely men: public scandal, social disgrace, even (gasp!) death. When a mail order spider succeeded in entangling an innocent, naive fly in his web, the tabloids were all over it. Today, however, except for the legendary antics of "Lonelyhearts Killers" Martha Beck and Raymond Fernandez, this breed of killer has all but vanished.

This was Power's forte: killing women he met through the mail. And biographer Bartlett is wholly caught up in the anti-lovelorn sentiments of the day. It's hard to figure out what upsets him more -- Powers for being "the most fiendish human being of his day" or the correspondence clubs because "They form setting for many a Bluebeard".

Unfortunately it's hard to untangle exactly who Harry Powers was or what he did from this book. Not only is this book obscure, but it's weird, often confusing, and occasionally incomprehensible. This does add to its eccentricity quotient, but it's hell on facts, especially considering that this is the only book on Powers.

A far as I can gather, Harry Powers was an apparently quiet, middle-aged man who resided in Clarksburg, WV with his wife during the '20s and '30s. He also owned a small farm in the nearby ironically named hamlet of Quiet Dell. And on this farm was a garage that, Bartlett intones, "was destined to become within a few short months an inferno of death, none the less tortuous than the historic Dante's." Astute readers may begin to detect subtle hints of Bartlett's addiction to hyperbole.

It was here in the basement of this hellish garage that Powers built four soundproof cells. In this basement during July 1931, five people would die violently at Power's hands. Two were women whom he'd wooed through the mail; the other three were the children of one of the women. Powers strangled and/or suffocated both women and two of the children. They were probably hanged; Bartlett prints of photo of a noose and trap door in the basement. The other child's head was smashed in with a hammer. All five bodies were later found buried in a sewer ditch on the farm.

He wasn't very hard to catch. Police investigating the disappearance of one of the women traced her to West Virginia through her treasured trove

HARRY F. POWERS (aka Hiram Drenth?)

His last victim

of love letters (see sidebar). Powers was quickly arrested. He confessed to all five killings in jail, evidently after considerable physical persuasion. Photos taken by his attorney after the confession show him considerably battered and bruised by the "confession" process.

Predictably, the crimes outraged the locals. One weekend, a mob formed in front of the jail with the thought of lynching clearly high in their collective minds. Police only saved Powers through the liberal application of tear gas. But this reprieve from the noose was only temporary. Convicted on all five counts, Powers was hanged on March 18, 1932.

Although he was only convicted of these five murders, there may have been more. Powers belonged to several matrimonial clubs, and had conducted a voluminous, far-flung correspondence, all apparently without his wife's knowledge. (As a matter of fact, he had met her through a club.) After his arrest, the Clarksburg police were deluged with inquiries from relatives of other missing women. However, apparently none of these women could be traced to Powers.

These are the basic facts. From here on out, things get strange and confused. Most crime books are written in a more or less linear fashion. Not this one. It reads like Bartlett wrote it in 15 or 20 sittings without bothering to re-read his previous work, and assembling the results in a more or less random order. Repeatedly, Bartlett re-introduces Powers as an arch fiend who had been "arrested for mass murder", as though the reader has forgotten. Various bits and pieces that logically belong together -- say the victim's backgrounds -- are scattered throughout the text. No editor ever got within a mile of this one.

And even worse than the organization is Bartlett's failure to resolve any of the real confusion surrounding the case. Take Power's real name. A man claiming to be the killer's father identified Powers as really being one Hiram Drenth (which is the name used by most sources today). After

POWERS' LAST LONLEYHEARTS LETTER

August 29, 1931

Darling:

Your sweet letter of the 24th reached me fine and honey it made me happy.

I want to thank you, dear, for your expression of praise regarding my parents. They were indeed wonderful parents....

There was something very close and beautiful, very dear and intimate between my mother and my father. I think it was one of those true loves of the world, one of the dearest married loves it has ever been my privilege to see. In fact I have an idealism regarding marriage and one, the great, the everlasting loves (and I have) I owe it to that early example...

Woman's holy courage was first revealed to me in my mother. I first saw it at my father's deathbed. And Daymor, dear, love can never be a light thing with me with such memories. My boyish heart was thus early impressed, sealed by the enduringness of love. I shall never forget it, never come from under the profound seriousness of the right love of the one man for the one woman, and vice versa.

I often think that such qualities as I may posses have come direct to me from that brave and gallant little figure of my mother. She had learned a stern lesson in the classroom of courage and fortitude...

...it was her guiding advice and training which had given me the ability and strength to withstand the many temptations of the present day world. I am grateful... for her teachings. They will last for life... Drinking and its many connections holds no pleasure for me. I sometimes wonder that if 'rot gut', as it is sometimes appropriately called, (but not in polite society) was forced on to people... and they were to suffer the same consequences they now bring upon themselves, what a protest would be raised.

There is a mistaken idea, even among some of the smartest men, that liquor makes them more brilliant. But one has to be coldly sober to see just how drunk and dull the best drinker becomes...

The pity of it is that some old men like to bray to boys about the amount of booze they could drink when they were lads. I remember one worn out specimen of a rounder, no longer able to drink anything but mineral water, and in the last stages of diabetes broadcasting his past ability as a booze-hound and chaser to a younger generation of drinkers. I wondered if they'd have sense enough to realize what his record had done for him.

No Daymor darling, I'll say right here that as a man with the brains and ability to attain the fortune a man can, I'll never make a drunken fool of myself, standing for a lot of wise cracks from a fat flabby faced night club hostess, who stands by like a Simon Legree in skirts, lip lashing her skinny cabaret girls to strut their stuff like so many blood hounds amid the cracked ice.

A drunk is never popular with anyone by himself. That's why you see him staggering along alone.

It makes no difference if he's a park bench bum or a bit gun in a dress suit, -- a drunk is a drunk, and any time they let drink get the best of them, they are on the down grade, no matter from how high they may start.

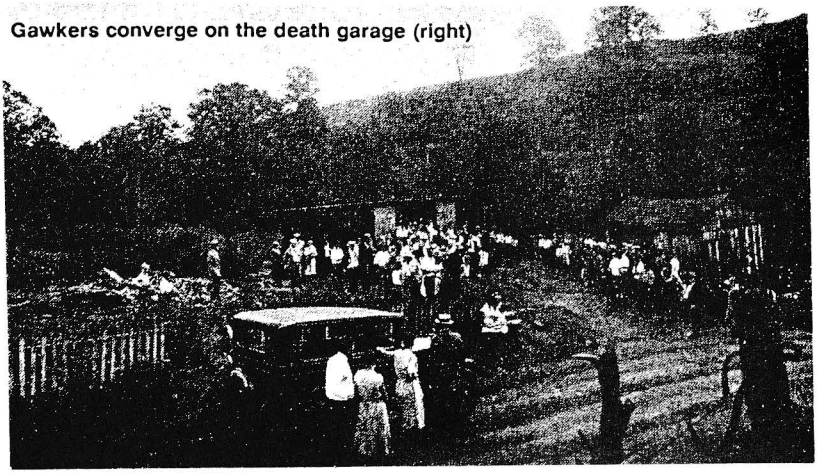
Well dear heart, it is nearly nine -- time to go to the office for the day.

Write me real soon honey

Love and kisses to you, dear -- from

"Connie"

Gawkers converge on the death garage (right)



calling him Drenth for a few pages, Bartlett suddenly switches back to Powers, claiming the id was never firmly established. Even how Powers did away with his victims is unclear. Bartlett teases the reader with hints about how Powers found "fiendish pleasure in tormenting, torturing, and punishing his victims", but fails to come through with the details.

It's not as though Bartlett was working from a handful of news clippings. He had an interesting, first hand connection with the case which explains a lot of his peevishness towards Powers. Bartlett was a lawyer who'd represented Powers on some business dealings until they had a falling out. It was over a lawsuit Bartlett handled for Powers against a vacuum cleaner company who'd broken into his house to repossess some vacuum cleaners. The court threw the lawsuit out as the company legally owned the vacuum cleaners (it sounds like Powers signed on as a salesman and kept the samples). When it came time to pay the legal fees, "... Powers flatly refused to pay, whereupon a heated argument ensued and Powers was given 'the rush' from the office... This writer... has (still) not collected his well earned fees." Do you detect a slight note of bitterness?

The most tragic part of this book, though, are some amazing details left out that, if true... wow! A few other sketchy accounts I've seen implicate Powers/Drenth in as many as 50 murders, and claim his five West Virginia victims were gassed in those airtight cells! Powers/Drenth himself watched their death throes through the window supposedly in the cell doors, claiming the thrill of this spectacle "beat any cathouse".

There's plenty of great raw material here -- Bartlett atones for a lot of his bad writing by reproducing numerous letters and police reports in toto, and printing numerous photos. It does make for a pleasant read. But there's plenty of room left for a good book (I'd even settle for a halfway decent article) on the case.

POWERS'S AD

10267-38-175-5'5. Civil engineer. College education. Worth $150,000 or more. Has income from $400 to $3000 per month. He writes: "My business enterprises prevent me from making many social contacts. I am, therefore, unable to make the acquaintance of the right kind of women. As my properties are located through the Middle West, I believe I will settle there when married. Am an Elk and a Mason. Own a beautiful 10-room home, completely furnished. My wife would have her own car and plenty of spending money."

THE SEXUAL CRIMINAL

by Dr. J. Paul de River
(Springfield, IL: Charles Thomas, 1949)

In every field of book collecting, one publisher stands out as a producer of collectable titles. They earn this distinction either through editorial policies which produce works of special interest, or via erratic production and marketing practices which guarantee rarity. Books published by these houses will always carry a little extra oomph with collectors solely by virtue of their imprint.

And for crime collectors, one of the hotter colophons is Charles Thomas, Publisher, who operated (operates?) out of the unlikely environs of Springfield, IL. Their specialty was police science. Most of their books were more or less straight criminological textbooks and monographs aimed at the trade. Due to their limited, specialized distribution, they're hard to come by today. For the most part, this is no loss unless you're a cop buff tech head. The intended audience for many of their books appears to have been policemen diligently studying for promotional exams.

But every once in awhile, they put out a title with broader appeal. And the advantage of police science books is that no holds are barred. Since they weren't marketed to the corner drugstore, the writers didn't have to worry about offending the customer or the druggist. The results are unexpurgated accounts of crime, illustrated with truly grisly photos. Only the occasional name is omitted or changed.

De River's *The Sexual Criminal* is one of the more desirable Thomas titles. De River was a shrink with the Los Angeles Police Department. He evidently got in a lot of trouble with the DA over the illustrations used in this little volume. Like any good forensic text, the photos are graphic, in this case depicting the aftermath of brutal sex crimes. Although no names are given, and the identity of the ravaged victims shielded with little bits of tape over their eyes, everything else is fair game: ravaged genitals, gaping wounds, missing nipples, removed viscera. This book is not for the squeamish or faint of heart.

Of course, this isn't just a picture book. Only a handful of photos qualify as brutal. The reproduction quality is so poor that you have to read the captions to appreciate the magnitude of what these guys (and girls!) did to these people. Without the text pointing out the details, most of the victims look merely banged up.

Primarily, this is a monograph describing and diagnosing various deviant, and often violent, sexual pathologies, all of which are illustrated with numerous case studies. De Rivers certainly had enough experience. As an ex-deputy DA says about him in the introduction, "I believe that he has examined carefully and scientifically more perverts than any other person the United States at the present time."

His basic pattern is to introduce a perversion or some sub-category of sex crime with a brief, theoretical discussion, and then cut to the case studies. He carefully describes his anonymous subjects, down to such details as "small penis (infantile type)", and gives a brief case history. He summarizes his sessions with them, sometimes including verbatim extracts from the transcripts. And finally, he gives his diagnosis.

After a few dozen such cases, he winds up with some general chapters on dream interpretation and psychological aspects of criminal investigation. An especially interesting chapter discusses "confessors", those spotlight hungry souls that are the bane of homicide investigators everywhere. As an added bonus, he tosses in a section entitled "The Poetic Nature of the SadoMasochist"

PERVERTS ON PARADE

Case #103: 11-yr old female juvenile sadist
Details: Subject beat her mother and 3-yr old brother to death with a claw hammer, and also assaulted her two sisters. She claims this was per her mother's request; she even stopped for a drink between blows.
Diagnosis: Electra Complex; "morally frigid and effectively cold".
Quotable Quote: "... she kept telling me to hit her some more, so I hit her some more."

Case #105: 20-yr old male rapist (DeWitt Cook)
Details: Specialized in raping blondes and beating them with a 2x4 so they couldn't identify them. Eventually killed one woman, and was executed in the gas chamber.
Diagnosis: Antagonistic towards women due to their remarks about his small penis; "sadistic sexual psychopath".
Quotable Quote: "He does not think that he is a sexual pervert."

Case #108: 32-yr old male sadistic pedophile
Details: One day lured three small girls into bushes to "look at the bunnies" before strangling and raping them. Found experience physically painful, yet quite enjoyable.
Diagnosis: "a super egoist"
Quotable Quote: "He states that he had always wanted something tight and young".

Case #109: 20-yr old male homosexual murderer
Details: Beat and stabbed a pickup to death in a drunken haze.
Diagnosis: homosexual sadist; homosexual to to "early seduction"
Quotable Quote: "The facial study clearly shows his contra-sexual nature".

wherein he reprints some very gothic mediocre poetry by one of his patients.

As a serious text, of course, this book is hopelessly outdated. De River's approach seems a little stuffy even for 1949, with homosexuals and oral sex practitioners lumped in with the necrophiles and lust killers. He displays what I consider a rather unhealthy, suspicious interest in all of his subject's sexual activities other than what he considers the "normal method of coitus in the bed." One "sexual criminal" is in here for taking up masturbation and drawing perverse pictures of teen girls after his divorce. And, in giving the case history of a necrophile, he excitedly points out, "He is also a confirmed masturbator and cunnilinguist".

His diagnoses aren't much better, tending towards being psychological laundry lists. After analyzing one rapist, he concluded "This subject is a chronic constitutional psychopathic deviate, sexual psychopath, sadomasochist, sexual pervert (cunnilinguist-satyr), rapist, fetishist sexual moron". Leave anything out, Paul?

Although he prints photos of most of his subjects (no eye tape here!), he names no names. The only one I've managed to identify is "Moonlight Maniac" DeWitt Cook of the aforementioned small penis (see "Perverts on Parade"). Some shouldn't be too hard to pin down. There're a few cases bizarre enough

Case #115: 23-yr old male lust murderer
Details: Claims he came across victim lying spread eagled outside a dance hall. He attempted to have sex with her, but stopped because something seemed wrong. She had been beaten to death, eviscerated, and raped.
Diagnosis: "Brutal sexual sadist"
Quotable Quote: "I thought she was knocked out and I might as well get what I was promised".

Case #118: 17-yr old female practitioner of sadistic beastiality
Details: Only interested in male animals. Currently having affair with police dog.
Diagnosis: Sadomasochist, evidenced by "acts of beastiality and lust for animals."
Quotable Quote: a fond childhood memory: "The sight of the stallion and his enormous organ was constantly on my mind"

Case #119: 21-yr old male necrophile
Details: Morgue attendant; assaulted virtually all female bodies under his care regardless of age. Drank the blood of an especially attractive 15-yr old.
Diagnosis: Necrophiles: "All of these individual are mentally and morally depraved"
Quotable Quote: "I had come to realize that I was different from other men".

Case #122: 22-yr old female sadistic criminal
Details: Cut baby son's head off with a bread knife.
Diagnosis: Schizoid, sadomasochist, criminally insane.
Quotable Quote: "I cut like I was cutting bread"

Case #126: 30-yr old male auto-sadist
Details: Enjoyed self-administered belt beating, knife cuts, and needle insertions.
Diagnosis: Masochist
Quotable Quotes: photo caption: "Belts used the sadomasochist for the purpose of self torture (note the tacks in belt)"

that I'm surprised I've never heard of them, and several of the guys wound up in the gas chamber. But the bulk of the stories are strictly small time, routine stuff -- perhaps incredibly twisted and bizarre routine stuff, but hardly that of banner headlines. And this is precisely what makes this book so interesting.

There is a certain segment of the population convinced that without Hugh Hefner, Larry Flynt, and the liberal media giving them ideas, everyone would happily lead lives of conventional connubial bliss. At the opposite end of the spectrum there are those convinced they are sexual pioneers on the vanguard of a revolution, boldly going where no genitalia has gone before. This book, written before most on either side were born, neatly demonstrates that there's nothing new under the sun. There was all kinds of nuttiness going down behind closed doors in the '30s and '40s.

As an informative text, a psychological reference, a true crime book, or just a good read, this book doesn't cut it. But it does fill a niche, providing a rare unexpurgated first-hand look at a wide variety of sex crimes and sex criminals seldom encountered on supermarket book racks. The historical perspective is an added bonus. And besides, what's more interesting than reading about other people's sex lives, the kinkier, the better?

TRUE MYSTERIES AND MURDERS

by Robert Henry Todd & Lloyd C. Steele
(Toronto: Duchess Printing & Publishing Co., 1945)

With all due respects to my many friends north of the border, there's something suspicious about a product (besides beer) that wraps itself in maple leaves and loudly proclaims its Canadianness. As I see it, it's not national pride or manifestation of a unique culture; it's to invoke the Canadian content laws. If it's good enough to compete on a level American playing field, "made in Canada" is in the finest of print. Witness the large number of "American" celebrities who are, in fact, closet Canadians: Michael J. Fox, Bryan Adams, and Lorne Greene.

A book self-consciously devoted to Canadian crime thus labors under a major handicap. A big name Canadian crime (quick, name one!) is apt to be the equivalent of a third rate American crime. I understand that even today, convenience store stickups merit headlines in Toronto. This book does its best to live down to these diminished expectations. Not only are these crimes dull, they appear to be reprints from Canadian true detective magazines (another frightening concept!). Duchess Publishing is responsible for at least one real stinker of a rag, *Keyhole Detective* where most of these stories probably first appeared.

I have not heard of these crimes. You have not heard of these crimes. 99% of the Canadians alive today haven't heard of these crimes. Consider these samples:

"The Case of the Calgary Ravisher": this brute dared rape a 13-yr old girl; fortunately for Canadian womanhood, an subsequent attempt on an 11-yr old is thwarted.

"Toronto's Park Double Death": a bitter old man finds someone sleeping on his favorite park bench; he gets a gun and shoots the interloper before killing himself.

"Montreal's St. Valentine's Day Knife Death": a soldier gets a letter about his wife's infidelity and goes home at his first opportunity to stab her. Happy Valentine!

"The Horrible Hamilton Axe Kill": an irate boarding house tenant attacks his husband&wife landlord team with axe and kills the husband.

"Dames Doom the Amorous Farmer": a hick farmer hits the bright lights of Montreal looking for a good time and winds up getting killed by hookers.

Of course, I'm so dyed-in-the wool that even here, I can find something meriting further study. "New Brunswick's Bannister Mystery" has potential. Brothers Daniel and Arthur Bannister attacked a happy little family in the backwoods of (where else?) New Brunswick, killing the mother, father, and one infant child and kidnapping another infant. Why? To keep their mother happy. She was several bricks short of a load and had a neurotic need for another kid. Until her boys' scheme, she'd been carting a doll around. Interesting stuff, but what you read here is pure tedium. Even though the writer had some first hand knowledge of the case -- I'm betting he covered it for a local paper -- most of the chapter is verbatim trial transcripts. This makes sense when you're probably only getting paid a penny (Canadian!) a word, but it's hell for posterity.

And this, my friends, illustrates why the market for Canadian crime books is almost completely restricted to north of the border.

TRAGIC TRAIN: THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

by Don DeNevi
(Seattle: Superior Publishing Co., 1977)

Train buffs are an odd lot, as evidenced by the railroad section at any well stocked used bookstore. Volume after lavishly illustrated volume celebrate the arcane, the obscure, and inane aspects of rail history. I mean, I like trains. But I'm not obsessed with them, which is the only rationale I can find for titles like *The Lake Superior Iron Ore Railroads*, *Pensy Steam and Semaphores*, or *Narrow Gauge Locomotives*, the last item a facsimile of the Baldwin Locomotive Company's 1876 catalog. Who really cares? Of course, rail buffs probably have the same reaction to my collection.

But among the vast shelves of literary rubble produced by this obsessive/compulsive legion are a handful of real gems, of which *Tragic Train* is a prime example. The "tragic train" is the "City of San Francisco", a prime examples of a "streamliner" -- an early style of diesel train with a streamlined, art-deco design. And in the easily skimmed pages of technical rhapsodizing so dear to the hearts of the choo-choo crowd, DeNevi makes the case for it being one impressive train. Powered by a 210-foot long power unit (the longest ever built), with its 17 luxuriously appointed cars hooked up (each named for a San Francisco landmark), it was almost a quarter mile long. It could make the SF/Chicago run in 39 hours, making it the Concorde of the '30s. It was the flagship of Southern Pacific's rail fleet.

Very nice, you say. So where's the crime?

On August 12, 1939, only seven months after its maiden run, the CoSF derailed on a small bridge over the Humboldt River in the Nevada outback. Ten of the 17 cars were thrown off the tracks. Several plunged into the river and the bridge was completely demolished. Nine passengers and 15 crew members died in the wreck, and many, many more were injured.

Of course, I'm not about to break theme here with a disaster book, no matter how good. This was no accident. It was sabotage -- the last major American case of mass murder via rail wreck, and one of the best. Brilliantly anticipating the post-war wave of plane bombers (Joseph Guay, 1949, 23 killed; John Graham, 1955, 44 killed), someone did a real professional job of tampering with the track. The end of one rail had been loosened, bent 4" in towards the center of the track, and spiked back down. Devices to detect track flaws had been cleverly circumvented, and the site chosen with an eye towards causing a spectacular accident. Its toll is less than only one other act of rail sabotage -- and that was during the Civil War.

DeNevi makes the most of this great crime/disaster. Like a good rail buff, he complements his account with dozens of gorgeous photos and drawings that lavishly illustrate the wreck and the investigation from every conceivable angle. The narrative is equally good, giving a detailed picture of the CoSF's last voyage, primarily through the reminisces of passenger Tony Firpo (trivia buffs: his boxing champ uncle, Lewis Firpo, made the mistake of knocking Jack Dempsey out of the ring). Firpo even wound up marrying a woman he met on the train. Talk about stories to tell the kids!

Not only is this wreck tops in train sabotage, it's high on any list of unsolved US crimes. DeNevi details SP's long, exhaustive, and ultimately fruitless investigation. The culprits plainly knew railrod tracks, making the obvious suspects disaffected former and current SP employees. Given SP's labor practices, this hardly narrowed the field. SP was so unpopular in certain circles that some radical newspapers accused them of faking to cover up a simple wreck. They were prepared to make SP's fall guy the next Tom

AMERICAN RAILROAD SABOTAGE HIGHLIGHTS

September 17, 1861: Near Huron, IN, a bridge collapses under a train carrying the 19th Illinois Regiment, killing 28. Confederate sabotage is suspected.

April 14, 1868: John Bowen, a discharged Erie Railroad clerk, loosens a rail near Carr's Rock, NY. To his surprise, this minor act of tampering causes a major accident, sending four passenger cars plunging 85' into a ravine and killing 24. Bowen pleads guilty and gets 10 years.

November 14, 1884: A rail removed from the tracks in Hempstead, TX, causes three passenger cars to fall into the Brazos River, killing 10. None of the saboteurs was ever captured.

August 27, 1891: Parties unknown remove spikes holding a rail down on a viaduct along the Catawaba River near Statesville, NC. An entire passenger train falls into the river, killing 22.

September 21, 1891: A gang of robbers spike a rail out of position near Osage, KS, derailing a train carrying $1 million in its express car and killing four. Unfortunately, the cash is too deeply buried in the wreckage to be stolen.

December 27, 1896: A excursion train derails on a loose rail and plunges into the Cahaba River outside Birmingham, AL, killing 11. Survivors reported being robbed by a gang of men who presumably loosened the rail; they are never caught.

July 3, 1904: An express train derails on a mis-set switch, attributed by some reports to sabotage, outside Lichtfield, IL. The wreck catches fire and 24 die, most from the flames.

Mooney.

Evidence was minimal. The remoteness of the site precluded eyewitnesses. Stolen track tools and a pair of coats were found in the river. Although one had been mended with distinctive, basbeball-style stitchwork, both were mass produced workman's models and proved untraceable despite thousands of circulars. Clearly the d'Autremont brothers were not involved.

No one was ever charged. SP's head detective interviewed 12,000 people and reviewed 197,000 reports on the case by his retirement in 1944 from the ongoing. Numerous suspects were cleared, including the aptly named "Man Without Ears" (and one foot). As of this book's writing 1977, SP still considered the case open and had all the evidence carefully stored in a special room in their Market Street headquarters. The rail detectives did have one unnamed prime suspect whom they felt strongly about it, but he died before they could dig up enough evidence for an arrest. Rats.

Few train wrecks merit their own book, but not only does this one succeed as a disaster, it's also a really great crime. And it would make the perfect gift for that crime/disaster buff on your Xmas list – if you can ever find it. Heh heh.

BAD BLOOD (apa MANHUNT)

by H. A. Willis

Auckland, New Zealand: Fontana/Collins Ltd., 1981

Foreign crimes generally get short shrift in America. Save for the handful of big-name British imports, the rest of the world is terra incognita for true crime fans. Much of this can be chalked up to the quality of out homegrown product and the language barrier. Less excusable is our ignorance of the more far flung portions of the British Commonwealth. Many English language gems await in these remote lands.

In the arcane field of New Zealand crime, Stanley Graham reigns supreme. Cover blurbs like "the biggest manhunt in New Zealand history" may not sound like much -- some may suggest it would take 100 men linking all of an afternoon -- but Graham's story is amazing. If it happened in America, it would be good. But for New Zealand, where assault rifle ownership isn't every psycho's inalienable right, it's astonishing.

Stanley Graham was an ordinary farmer on the sparsely inhabited South Island west coast. Married with two children, he owned a small dairy farm in the center of the Koiterangi (now Kowhitirangi) Valley. He never drank, and kept himself in excellent physical condition. His tastes in recreation were violent, but hardly unusual for the area: guns, hunting, and cockfighting.

In the late '30s, Graham started acting strange. Always quick tempered, he became convinced his neighbors were spreading rumors and plotting against him. And his wife, instead of long-suffering, was equally paranoid. Incident piled upon incident. Neighbors were threatened. A mortgage agent was tackled by Graham and threatened with an axe by his wife. Graham even decked his own sister on Christmas when she tried to deliver gifts.

Things came to a head in 1941 when Graham's prized cattle began dying. Conventional thinkers chalked the beast's death up to neglect; Graham accused neighbors and passers-by of poisoning them. He was sinking fast for no apparent reason. As Willis says, "The truth is that we do not really know why Graham went off the rails; we only know the circumstances."

On October 8, 1941, Graham pulled a gun on a neighbor as he bicycling by. The neighbor phoned the police, and the investigating constable determined that Graham should be legally disarmed. This NRA nightmare is perfectly legal in New Zealand

That afternoon, four constables showed up to do the deed. They counted on Graham to be cowed by their numbers. Evidently, only one carried a gun, and it was in his pocket, unloaded.

After looking around, they entered the house and ordered Graham to surrender his guns. He ordered them to leave; when they didn't, he opened fire. He hit all four, killing two outright.

When Graham stepped out of his house to reconnoiter, one of the wounded constables tried to flee. Graham picked him off easily. According to Graham's wife, the fourth constable, as he lay in the farmhouse mortally wounded, asked her to write a "confession": "I E.M. Best intended to murder Stan Graham". He then signed it. Authorities believe some coercion may have been involved.

Two passersby, attracted by the commotion, rushed in to aid the policemen. Graham shot one, who died 17 months later from his wounds. The other fled to summon help as Graham packed his guns and headed for the bush.

Already, this alone was more excitement than Koiterangi normally sees in

a century. But they hadn't seen anything yet.

Considerable confusion reigned after the quintuple shootings, which had taken out 80% of the local police department. Police poured in, and the Home Guard (the local militia) turned out in force. In the great Kent State tradition of the Ohio National Guard, these weekend warriors would get themselves in a real fix.

The next evening, a rotating contingent of Home Guards stationed themselves inside Graham's house in some misguided effort to guard it. Graham showed up just before dark and started shooting, pinning the guards down. The next 45 minutes were chaos; no one was quite sure where Graham was. When the police drove up, someone shot at them -- Graham? The guards? Two Guardsmen were killed, but Graham took a bullet in the shoulder before fleeing. This untreated wound would hamper him seriously over the coming days.

The news hit New Zealand like a bombshell. The government offered "the whole resources of the country" to help apprehend the madman. Police and military came in from all over the country. Over the next 10 days, the peaceful valley was converted into an armed camp, swarming with over 200 policemen and soldiers, plus numerous armed civilian volunteers. Planes flew overhead, and at least three machine gun nests were put in near Graham's house. The offer of a tank, however, was politely refused.

Two days later, Graham was spotted climbing a fence. Once again, he exchanged fire with police, but this didn't hit any. The police, however, nicked his shooting hand.

Despite hundreds of searchers and his two rapidly-going gangrenous wounds, Graham remained at large until the 20th when police finally caught up to him and shot him. He died early the next morning. Ironically enough, his hiding place turned out to be, not a remote mountain cranny, but a hollow tree out on an open plain.

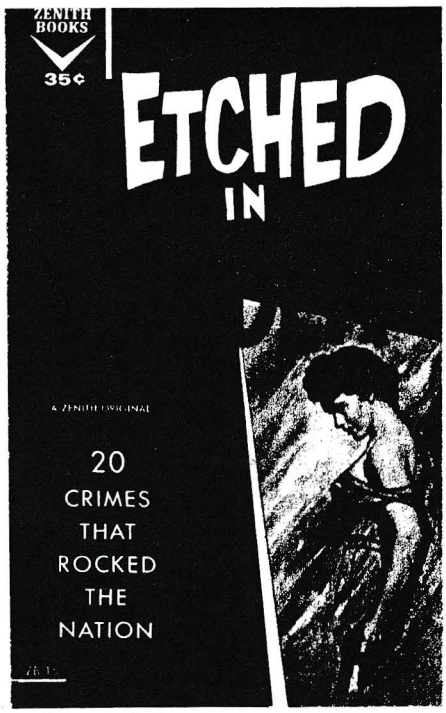
Graham's wife & kids changed their name and moved off into obscurity. And anticipating Ed Gein's neighbors, locals burned the house down.

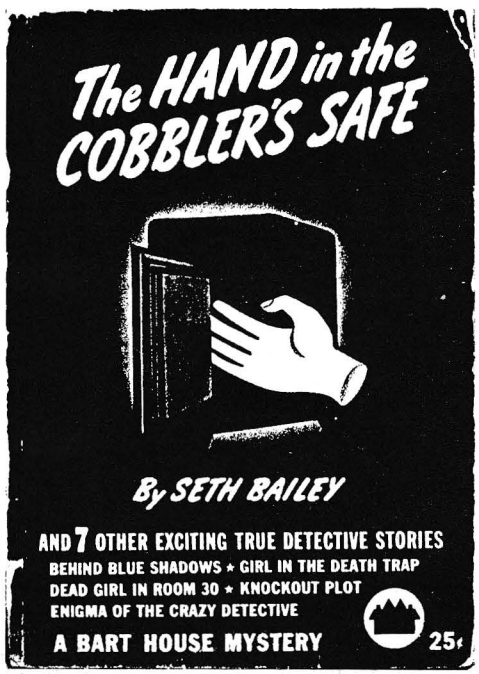
The story was widely reported. Even Nazi propagandist Lord Haw Haw supposedly got in the act, claiming Hitler sent Graham a telegram: "Hold the South Island. Sending another man to take the North Island." But today, it is only remembered in New Zealand, even making to the screen in the 1981 Brit/NZ movie "Bad Blood".

Undoubtedly, this book is the definitive and best account. The casual fan may be put off by the minute by minute reconstruction of events, but you do know how to skim, don't you? At least it's germane facts, not useless padding. Willis even points out where the evidence is confused, a rarely encountered act of journalistic honesty.

For all of is antipodean locale, Graham's story deserves to be more widely known in America. We've always admired the lone man taking on city hall, and the whole thing sounds suspiciously close to the plot of the first Rambo movie. Try to get your friends in New Zealand to score you a copy.

Paperback Gallery

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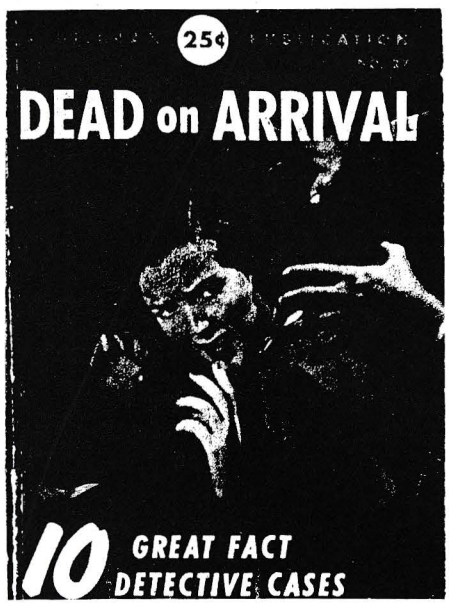
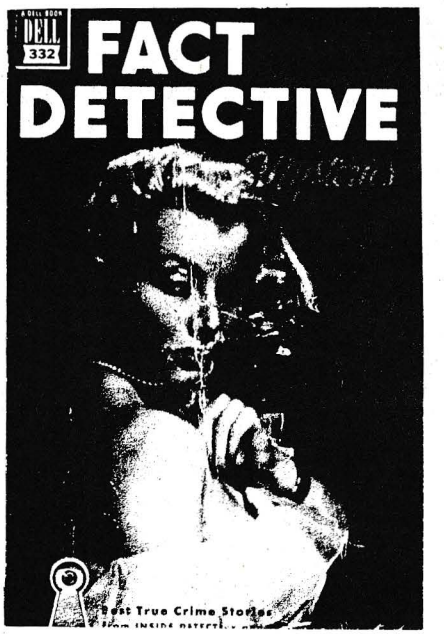




It may be difficult to believe today, but true crime used to be the smallest of paperback genres. In the old days, mysteries and westerns were hot, non-fiction was not. Most of the early houses published only a handful of crime titles; several, none at all. It wasn't for lack of an audience. This was the golden age of the true detective magazine, with so many titles coming out every month, not even the most dedicated buff could keep up.

Nonetheless, some publishers tried paperback anthologies of crime stories from their true detective and men's magazines. The above are all samples of these ill-fated experiments, none of which generated enough enthusiasm for a sequel. The writing was better than today's *True Detective,* but it wasn't that good, and they left out all the neat photos. Most of the crimes aren't memorable either, but you've got to admit -- GREAT COVERS!

THE MURDEROUS TRAIL OF CHARLES STARKWEATHER

by James Reinhardt
(Springfield, IL: Charles Thomas, 1960)

Although many that may beg to differ (sorry, Miriam!), I think Charles Starkweather epitomizes the '50s JD on a killing spree. His only real competition, Charles "Pied Piper of Tucson" Schmid, although interesting, wasn't even a teenager, and he killed his three teen girl victims for purely personal reasons. Starkweather, on the other hand, was only 17 when he started his 11-victim spree, accompanied (some say aided) by his 14-yr old girlfriend Caril Fugate. And his motive was straight out of *Rebel Without A Cause*. He killed out of a sense of frustration, striking blind, rebellious, and above all adolescent blows against a world that he felt didn't understand him, a world he hated. He didn't avoid detection; he craved it. He only avoided capture so he could keep on killing. The image of the two thrill seeking teens, motivated only by their own alienation, cutting a bloody swath across the frozen Nebraska landscape, is classic. And Starkweather stayed in character to the end, all but strutting to the gas chamber. He wanted to go out in blaze of glory, dying at the peak of his fame than living on as a forgotten man. How romantic!

This is classic juvenile delinquency, a role tailor-made for James Dean or Marlon Brando. It inspired the movie *Badlands* and has been the subject of three books. Two are widely available: William Allen's *Starkweather* (Houghton Mifflin, 1976), a nice straightforward account and Beaver, Riple and Trese's *Caril* (Lippincott, 1974), which focuses on Fugate's attempt to win parole 20 years later. Both have come out in paperback and are pretty easy to come by.

This leaves *The Murderous Trail of Charles Starkweather* for the completists. Published by your friends and mine at Charles Thomas, it's aimed at serious students of the case and is hence insanely difficult to find today. My copy, for instance, was discarded from a police department library.

The good news for those on a limited budget is that this book is not essential. Both *Starkweather* and *Caril* are good books, and use *Murderous Trail* as a major source. Nonetheless, this slender volume is far from superfluous. It's loaded with primary source material: utterances and writings of Starkweather himself, enough to whet the appetite of any hardcore fan. If they taught Starkweather in college, this would be on the supplemental reading list.

It's a good thing it's not the only book on the case. Reinhardt puts recapping Starkweather's crimes way down on his list (see sidebar). He waits until the end of the book, and then only gives a brief, bare-bones account. He also doesn't touch on any of the controversies surrounding the case, most notably the extent of Caril's involvement: eager accomplice or unwilling hostage?

Reinhardt has far more serious fish to fry. A criminology professor at the University of Nebraska (Go Big Red!) in Starkweather's hometown of Lincoln, he's far more interested in dissecting Starkweather's motivations and analyzing his personality than in recounting niggling details of the murders. The bulk of the book is devoted to digging out and presenting a

STARKWEATHER'S SPREE
1957-1958

December 1 (#1): Starkweather shoots a gas jockey during an early morning hold up, ostensibly when he made a grab for his handkerchief mask "... cause dead men don't talk".

January 21 (#2, #3, #4): Starkweather shoots 14-yr old girlfriend Caril Fugate's mother and stepfather, and beats her 30 month old half sister to death with his rifle. They spend the next six days in the house with the bodies.

January 27 (#5): Leaving the Fugate house, the teens go on a road trip, but get stuck in the mud on the farm of August Meyer outside Bennet, NB. Even though Meyer had previously befriended Starkweather, both he and his dog are shot after an argument with the hot-headed teen.

January 27 (#6, #7): Turning to hitchhiking, the deadly duo are picked up by model teenage couple Robert Jensen, Jr. and Carol King. Starkweather forces them to drive to an abandoned school. He shoots both in a storm cellar, and sexually assaults King.

January 28 (#8, #9, #10): Doubling back to Lincoln, Starkweather and Fugate invade the opulent home of industrialist C. Lauer Ward. After forcing Mrs. Ward and the family maid to wait on them hand and foot, Starkweather stabs them, clubs the family poodle to death with his rifle, and shoots Mr. Ward when he comes home.

January 29 (#11): The teens return to the open road. In Douglas, WY, Starkweather decides to switch cars. Spotting shoe salesman Merle Collison sleeping in his car, Starkweather shoots him. Passing motorists intervene, Fugate surrenders, and the sheriff catches Starkweather after a high speed chase.

psychological profile of Starkweather.

Reinhardt based the book on 30 hours of interviews he did with Starkweather in prison. Starkweather, for the most part, cooperated eagerly. He wanted to tell his life story, supposedly to warn other teens of the errors of his ways. He even drafted a manuscript of his autobiography which he was convinced would earn his family $30,000. However, on some details, he was evasive. He had excuses for most of his killings ("self defense"), but he refused to admit killing Caril's half-sister, and was plainly uncomfortable about his last victim. It's hard come up with a good reason for shooting a sleeping stranger.

The portrait painted is of a teenager destroyed by his innate drives and paranoid delusions. Starkweather was never destined for higher things in life. A high school drop-out at 16, he was cursed with a short stature, bowlegs, a stammer, and no discernable talents. Nonetheless, he had no juvenile record and earned a decent, if marginal, living as a garbageman.

But, beneath this facade of a white trash loser, Reinhardt found a ravenous ego with a pathological hunger for power and position, a hunger Starkweather knew he could never satisfy through normal channels. His personality was dominated by "arrogant hostility and false pride".

It was this frustration that put Starkweather at odds with the world at a

THE QUOTABLE CHARLES STARKWEATHER

They got in my way and I killed them.

Jesus wouldn't a let me be treated the way I was treated...

I am not scared of anybody that ever live (sic), I've got a gun... I know how to shoot... I've got a girl.

The people I murdered had murdered me. They murdered me slow like.

Sometimes the hate was so real like something kind of dead or asleep and beginning to wake up and stir around. Then I always wanted to do something... maybe go out and rob a bank or throw garbage in some old bitch's face...

My gun never played children's games. I was never much for toy guns. I never learned to shoot tin cans for fun. Tin cans can't hate or run or cry or beg or talk.

Sometimes I thought about murderin' the whole human race. I never thought much about just killin' individuals.

I'm not real sorry for what I did cause for the first time me and Caril had more fun...

Jesus made me sorry that I killed them people... if they'd a done what I tolded (sic) then... I wouldn't a killed them...

The world is lifeless, anyhow, like the people I killed.

Why did others think this was a wonderful world?... It was never a wonderful world for me.

tender age. He never hated his teachers -- he "hated the world they belonged to". Of average intelligence, he periodically lashed out, and developed quite a reputation for fighting. Yet, he wasn't an especially bad discipline problem. Like the tip of the iceberg, his pugnaciousness was just a small sign of the steadily increasing rage bottled up behind his everyday mask.

Starkweather himself pinpointed the start of his rebellion as his first day at school, when the kids started taunting him about his bowlegs and his stammer. "Red headed peckerwood" was a favored epithet. Over the years, his rage and hatred grew behind his carefully constructed facade until, inevitably, he blew.

Unlike many criminal biographers, Reinhardt doesn't take everything Starkweather told him as gospel. He bothered to cross check with friends, family, and associates, and found no evidence of the continuous abuse that Starkweather brooded over. He diagnosed Starkweather as an "illusional

PEOPLE ARE TALKING...

Teacher: "He had a temper, sure, but I never thought he could ever kill one human being..."

Schoolmate: "He had his faults but I thought he was a pretty good kid."

Schoolmate: "All he wanted to do was to put hot rods together and tear them down again."

Teacher: "Once I came upon the scene of one of his fights just in time to see his antagonist, a boy somewhat older than Charles and a little larger, being helped to his feet. The fight had taken place in a 'crushed rock' driveway... Charles had churned the boy's face into the bed of ground-rock..."

Girlfriend (junior high): "In all the time I knew him, I never once heard him swear... He never even tried to put his arm around me... I think he was one of the finest boys I've ever known. I can't believe he's done this. Maybe he's changed a lot in the last four years."

Psychiatrist: "Pumping bullets into a human is no different to Starkweather than pumping bullets into a rabbit."

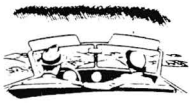
man" living in a fantasy world that brutalized him. The entire "World vs. Starkweather" was strictly the product of Starkweather's twisted mind and ravenous ego, wherein minor slights were transformed in egregious insults. Reinhardt writes, "Hate, suspicion, and a hunger for power had closed off the normal inlets for kindness, generosity, and trust. Nothing got through but fear and hate and disgust. Hate was the alloy that hardened hate." The results? "He had come to hate the world before he was 17 years old. For the last two years of his life before his arrest... he seemed preoccupied with thoughts of death and an unconscious search for disaster". Starkweather's only passions in life were guns and hot rods. Fittingly, he enjoyed playing chicken.

Interesting stuff, of course, especially the pages and pages of Starkweather in his own words. Unfortunately, the organization is rather scattershot, and Reinhardt is extremely prone to belaboring his points and getting carried away in his psychological analysis, completely neglecting any influence the outside world may have had on Starkweather. Oddly enough, although he often mentions (but doesn't blame) Starkweather's fondness for violent TV shows and comic books, James Dean, on whom Starkweather plainly modelled himself, isn't mentioned once!

Personally, I can take or leave all the psychology stuff in here. But there's a wealth of interesting detail (even a few of Starkweather's drawings) awaiting the dedicated Starkweather buff. And the book isn't half bad. It's a nice way to end, but a rotten way to begin a Starkweather collection.

BORN TO KILL

by Glenn Shirley
(Derby, CT: Monarch Books, 1963)



One of my favorite categories of obscure true crime books is paperback originals. To the uninitiated, those are the ones that aren't reprints of hardbacks -- their covers proudly proclaim, "First Publication Anywhere!". They're cheap, require little shelf space, and are seldom dull. They may be sleazy, sensationalistic, and sometimes inaccurate, but they often cover good cases too trashy for hardbacks. And sometimes, they are actually good.

Born To Kill is one of these softcover gems. But, contrary to what Warren Oates and Charles Willeford fans may expect, it has nothing to do with the film adaptation of *Cockfighter*. The subject is hitchhikers, not chickens.

Once upon a time, picking up hitchhikers was, if not respectable, at least not especially risky. The hitcher was taking the chance; the driver's only worry was his passenger's annoying personal habits. Billy Cook helped change all that. And in doing so, he became one of the first great spree killers of the '50s.

Cook came from a dirt-poor, hard scrapple background. He was born in Joplin, MO, one of eight children. A growth was surgically removed from one of his eyelids as an infant, leaving it perpetually half closed. Besides earning him nicknames like "Cockeyed Cook", it gave him a dull, vaguely menacing appearance.

Cook's mother died when he was 5, and his father virtually abandoned the brood. At one point, before Social Services got ahold of them, the children were literally living in a cave. His brothers and sisters were quickly adopted, but Cook went through a series of foster homes before one stuck. And by then, it was too late.

He started serious juvenile crime when he was only 11. His record was so impressive, he spent virtually his entire adolescence in custody, and wound up finishing his juvenile sentence in the Missouri State Penitentiary. He was 22 when he was finally released in June, 1950.

A few days before New Years 1951, as the story in *Born To Kill* goes, Cook tried to hit on a Mexican dancer in a border nightclub. She politely rebuffed him. Blaming her lack of interest on his droopy eye, Cook figured he'd have to compensate with a nice healthy roll of cash -- say $18,000 worth. And lacking education, experience or skills (his only post-pen job had been washing dishes), he resolved to pick it up at the point of a gun.

The next day, Cook embarked on one of the most poorly conceived and utterly irrational crime sprees in history. His first step towards raising that $18,000 was buying a .32 automatic pistol in El Paso. Properly armed, he stuck his thumb out and went to work.

A kind-hearted mechanic from a gentler age picked him up. Things were uneventful until they reached Tulsa. Cook pulled his gun on the driver, robbed him, and stuck him in the trunk. A few miles down the road, the mechanic managed to force his way out. Although Cook gave chase, he held his fire and let this one get away. He returned to the car and continued driving. It stalled a few miles down the road -- a recurrent motif in the Cook saga.

That December 30, Carl Mosser must have been feeling on top of the world. A young farmer, he was driving his wife and their three small children on a well deserved family vacation to visit his brother in New Mexico. Possibly out of lingering Christmas cheer, he willingly stopped to aid the saggy-eyed young man with stalled car near Luther, OK. It was the biggest -- and last -- mistake he would ever make.

Mosser's Good Samaritan role ended immediately. Within minutes, he was

Cook's private chauffeur, and his family unwilling passengers. Over the next two days, Cook forced Mosser to drive aimlessly for thousands of miles through the Southwest. Periodically, they picked up food "to go" from roadside stands – Mosser buying, Cook watching, his hand ominously in his pocket. It's unclear what role, if any, this road trip was to play in raising that $18,000.

At least once, Mosser made a break. Pinning Cook's arms in a roadside convenience store, he shouted for help from the gas station owner. The owner, however, was ahead of his time. He told Mosser, "If he's got a gun, get him out of here. I don't want any shooting in my store."

Eventually, Cook had enough. As he later told the police, "The kids were crying, the dame was hysterical and started screaming... so I plugged them all!" He dumped the bodies in an abandoned mineshaft outside his native Joplin, ditched the car near Tulsa, and headed towards Blythe, CA.

After finding the blood-splattered car, the cops figured Mosser for the killer – just another disgusted father. But, as eyewitness reports of the family's strange odyssey poured in, they turned their attention elsewhere. They quickly connected the Mosser disappearances with the Texas mechanic's kidnapping. And in the mechanic's abandoned car, Cook had thoughtfully left everything behind but his business card. Soon, he was the target of one of the biggest manhunts in southwest history.

The cops caught up to him in Blythe, CA, but a little too fast for their own good. Cook kidnapped the first cop snooping around his room and forced him to drive into the desert. Leaving him bound, but alive, Cook used the police car to pull over one Robert Dewey. History repeated itself, but this time, Dewey only had to play chauffeur for a few miles before Cook shot him.

Somehow, Cook snuck into Mexico and once again stalled his car. On January 7, he stuck his thumb out once more. A pair of American men on a camping trip picked him up. They were his hostages until the 15th, when the Mexican police spotted the trio. As his captives later explained, they never made a break because of Cook's weird eye. They couldn't tell if he was awake or asleep.

Cook was first tried on federal kidnap charges for the Mosser abductions. He pled guilty, but managed to parlay his deprived background into a 300 year Alcatraz sentence. The State of California then tried him for the Dewey murder, and quickly sentenced him to death. He died in the San Quentin gas chamber on December 12, 1952 without ever having come close to the Mexican dancer or the $18,000.

As far as I know, this the only book on Cook, and it seems to be a good, complete account. However, there are two minor details that should be cleared up: the dog and the tattoo.

Virtually every shorter account claims even the Mosser's dog was a victim of Cook's wrath. *Born to Kill* never even mentions the beast, and I agree. The Mossers were farmers. It would be a lot easier for them to leave the dog behind than bring it along. Sharing a car with three kids and a dog for a thousand miles isn't anyone's idea of a vacation. Plus, I have a photo of the mineshaft after the recovery of the bodies. The Mossers are neatly laid out, but there's no sign of Fido.

Most accounts also mention Cook having H-A-R-D tattooed across the knuckles of one hand, and L-U-C-K on the other. I've seen a photo of the "hard" hand, but Shirley quotes a warden recalling how Cook never got around to the "luck" part. Give him partial credit here.

Although discrediting these myths does take away some of Cook's aura, he still was a colorful character. This book may be obscure, but it's complete, well-done, and certainly worth the hunt for anyone who likes Cook and/or plain hates hitchhikers. Good things can come in soft covers.

38 WITNESSES

by A. M. Rosenthal
(New York: McGraw Hill, 1964)

I consider the Kitty Genovese case the most famous forgotten murder of the last 50 years. Odds are you don't know the name. And if you do, you can't name her killer. But everyone knows the story.

Kew Gardens, Queens, 1964 -- a, quiet middle class area in a city rapidly going to seed. Before dawn, a knife wielding man attacks a woman in front of her apartment house. She screams; her neighbors waken and peek out at the disturbance. One screams at the man to leave that woman alone. Oddly enough he does, and walks off. But he returns a few minutes later to continue. It takes 35 minutes, but he eventually leaves Kitty half nude and bleeding to death in an apartment vestibule. At least 38 otherwise respectable New Yorkers are witness. None of them did *anything* to stop it, not even calling the police. Reportedly, some turned up their TVs to drown out the screams. The cops didn't get the first call until it was all over. And that public spirited citizen first phoned a friend for advice -- a woman was being knifed to death practically on his doorstep.

This is great raw material. It received international attention at the time and even today, 30 years later, it remains the ultimate example of urban man's "screw you" attitude towards his fellows. It's been the basis for songs, a play, a movie, innumerable op-ed pieces, and even an Edgar-winning short story, Harlan Ellison's "The Whimper of Whipped Dogs". If it happened today, every motel in Queens would have been filled with free lancers pecking out book proposals before Kitty's body was cold.

But this was the '60s, and sadly, this is evidently the only book. Kitty deserves better. The author is *NY Times* editor Abe Rosenthal -- the same guy *Spy* called Abe "I'm Writing As Bad As I Can" Rosenthal. And he lives down to it. This book is excruciatingly bad.

First, it's incredibly short. It may be a hardback, but it's the size of a paperback with only 87 pages of big type and lots of pretty photos. Now, I'm never one to fault brevity and conciseness, increasingly rare virtues in the true crime world. But, despite the small size, Rosenthal still shamelessly pads the scrawny little thing.

It's not really about the crime, it's about Rosenthal. He describes hearing about the story over lunch with the Police Commissioner: "I experienced then that most familiar of newspapermen's reactions -- vicarious shock... the realization that what you are seeing or hearing will startle a reader. The reporter or editor need not, and usually is not, shocked... but he experiences the fleeting realization that readers will be." Pages are devoted to the oh-so difficult and germane task of picking a reporter to cover this shocker. He reprints newsclips, interjects his own asshole-ish reactions (as if anyone beside Mama "My Son The Big Shot Editor" Rosenthal cares), and in general acts like a real prick. He really doesn't get around to the actual crime until the last 10 pages. Take away Rosenthal's reactions and the newspaper shop talk, and you barely have a pamphlet.

I've always thought that a bad book is better than none until this one. There's a much better (and longer!) account in Seedman's *Chief*. Some books are obscure for a very good reason.

THE BADGE

by Jack Webb
(New York: Prentice Hall, 1958)

Dum da da dum.

The story you're about to read could easily be written to mimic the style and structure of a "Dragnet" episode. That's because it's by *that* Jack Webb on the subject nearest his heart: the Los Angeles Police Department. It's not easy, but I'll resist the temptation.

This book transcends the "support your local police" genre. To call it pro-cop is an understatement. It's more like a love song to Joe Friday's employer, sealed with dozens of big sloppy kisses. Webb doesn't just describe the LAPD; he rhapsodizes over its every aspect, from crusading police chief William Parker down to the rookie traffic cop at Hollywood and Vine. All necessary irony and cynicism must be supplied by the reader.

Webb's LAPD is "Dragnet" in the flesh: noble men whose beat comprises "454.749 square miles to break a cop's back -- and sometimes his heart." As he describes the typical cop, "Everybody in the city knows him. He's the harness bull who shoulders through the street crowd watching a fight and growls paternally, 'All right! Break it up!'" Their routine: a cop leaps on a bus careening out of control after the driver collapses of insulin shock; detectives frantically track down a woman to whom a druggist has accidently dispensed a deadly poison. Webb even makes the Vice Squad sound like angels without halos.

High on the list of scourges combatted by the LAPD are drugs. Webb illustrates the peril through the tragic tale of one 16-yr old girl from a good family. She went to her first marijuana party and got caught. Her parents were no pinko permissives; they immediately packed her off to boarding school. But it was already too late. That single taste of the devil weed put her on a one way path that led straight to alcohol, heroin, and an inter-racial marriage.

Fortunately, the LAPD stops at nothing to root out this evil. Even the cadets at the police academy pitch in, risking their lives to go undercover on the drug scene. Webb describes how, "As the last touch, they grew goatees and sideburns... They swapped their trim Academy khaki for loud sport shirts, striped trouser, and gone jackets..." This particular operation led to the arrest of 160 pushers. But for one girl, it was already too late.

Although for the most part Webb sticks to describing LAPD structure and operations, he occasionally sticks in a real case. Most are interesting: a cop-gone-bad dramatized on "Dragnet", a bar bombing that killed six. Most notable, though, is the Black Dahlia, the LAPD's most famous unsolved case and the only part of the book that isn't unconscious satire.

Webb plainly disapproved. He describes the Dahlia as "a lazy girl and irresponsible..." He calls this case "the other side of the shield" and gives a graphic, almost clinical description of her chopped up, mutilated remains. He summarizes her last days, and conveys an excellent sense of the mystery that continues to surround her murder. The cops never came close to solving this one, and it wasn't for any lack of trying. One detective racked up 33 days of overtime on the case in a month. Of course, things weren't helped along to the 38 people who confessed to the killing. Anthologists, take note here.

Although I'm sure it was unplanned, Webb produced a camp masterpiece -- slick, clean, well-written, and unintentionally hilarious. Be sure to bring it on your pilgrimage to the Jack Webb shrine (honest!) at the LA Police Academy.

GAME OF THIEVES

by Robert Rosberg
(New York: Everest House, 1981)

Too often we forget murder, and even moreso serial murder, is but a small part of the criminal spectrum. Now, don't get me wrong. No one appreciates a good hammer murder more than I. But you have to admit that murders are generally far from the best and brightest. They're always getting caught, usually all too easily. And it's a rare killer indeed who can turn his avocation into a true profession.

So every once in a while, I break out of the serial killer rut by reading about real pros with real skills. For most people, this means con men; for me, it's capers -- the big, elaborate robberies and burglaries requiring months of planning, tons of equipment, and small armies of thieves to carry out. The Great Train Robbery; Brinks, Lufthansa, the Hotel Pierre -- these are the words that make my heart beat faster.

Although I have books on all these classic jobs, *Game of Thieves* is my favorite property crime book. Unlike most others, it devotes a chapter to each of several cases. Even more than murder books, caper books tend towards being big, unwieldy semi-novels written with Hollywood in mind. Being lazy, I prefer the Reader's Digest Condensed Books approach. I picked up enough cocktail chatter on several major heists from this book in the time it takes most people to wade through *Big Stick-up At Brinks*.

The shorter format doesn't mean sketchy. Rosberg isn't just another cub reporter sick of covering liquor store hold-ups. He spent 20 years in the security industry and is enough of an authority on bank robbers to give this book some real technical meat. But, unlike many other books under discussion here, this one is well-written and quite readable.

To put things in perspective, Rosberg does discuss the history of bank burglary (cracksmen) and robbery (stick 'em up). And this is interesting enough by itself, especially the never ending war between safe designers and safe crackers. But the bulk of the book covers eight specific cases. A few of these are composites of several jobs -- slightly annoying, but they do effectively give a feel for pros at work. The other cases are real. Although most have received minimal book coverage, this is not due to their inherent lack of interest.

My favorite bank burglary in this book (and high on my all-time list) is "The Cannon Shot" about the 1965 Brinks-Syracuse job. A gang of men headed by Joel Singer broke into the Brinks warehouse one weekend. Inspired, perhaps, by a boastful vault salesman bragging "It'll take a cannon to get into one of these babies", they brought one: a Finnish 20mm anti-tank gun. It took 33 shots, fired from only four feet away, to blast through the vault's 18" reinforced concrete wall. The final shells did destroy a fair amount of the money. Nonetheless, the gang made a clean getaway with $433,000. None of the money would ever be recovered.

Singer was tripped up by his own parsimony. His uncle, who had helped him pick up the cannon, only received $167 for his trouble. Once he spotted the connection between his nephew's gun and the highly publicized burglary, he quickly figured, in a classic example of cost/benefit analysis, that the price of his complicity was worth a lot more than $167. He turned Singer in exchange for complete immunity. He probably got to keep the $167, too.

Joel was duly tried, convicted, and sentenced to seven years. After doing his time without incident, he was deported to his native Canada. He committed suicide in Montreal several months later. None of his comrades were ever

caught.

On the robbery side, the highlight is "Incident on Avenue P" about the 1972 "Dog Day Afternoon" case. You could call these guys the amateurs who provide the comic relief in the book dominated by seasoned pros.

John Wojtowicz was quite a piece of work. A Vietnam vet, he was gay, recently divorced, unemployed, and convinced he was dying of cancer. And to top it all off, his current boyfriend was badgering him for to fund a sex change operation.

Wojtowicz decided crime was the answer. With two inexperienced accomplices, he inaugurated his criminal career by holding up the Bensonhurst branch of Chase Manhattan Bank. Things don't go according to plan. Within minutes they found themselves with nine hostages, trapped in a bank surrounded by 50 million cops, reporters, and spectators. (It doesn't take much to draw a crowd in Brooklyn). After a memorable 12 hour standoff, during which John answered the phone and talked to cops, reporters, relatives, and cranks (one repeat caller kept advising him to "Kill them all"), the cops lured them out with the promise of a plane at JFK. The slogan of cornered hip young criminals back then was still "Fly me to Cuba".

The police thoughtfully provided John & the crew with a limousine, complete with a FBI agent for a chauffeur. The drive to JFK was uneventful. And there it was, the promised plane, all ready to go. Unfortunately, this sight made John and accomplice Sal Naturile relax just a little bit -- enough for the driver to pull out a carefully hidden gun and blow Sal away while agents outside grabbed John. The hostages weren't even nicked!

On the professional side of bank robbery, we have the Pardue brothers, aka "The Bank Bombers". John and James combined the careful, meticulous planning of seasoned pros with an almost psychopathic taste for violence. In an 18 month nation-wide spree starting in 1968, they cleanly robbed at least 5 banks. Along the way, they murdered five people, including two accomplices, their father, and their grandmother. Their original style was to burst in brandishing machine guns, fire a few rounds into the ceiling, grab the money, and get out before anyone knew what was happening. Maybe this was just too easy.

On their last two jobs, they used a novel method of foiling pursuit. Minutes before the robbery, they would detonate a briefcase bomb in the local police station to take out the communications center. To add to the confusion, during their last robbery, they exploded a second bomb in the bank after they fled and blew up a getaway car when they were through with it.

They were caught through their unaccountable failure to wear their usual ski masks on their last job. One description matched that of a man the cops saw loitering around the police station before the blast. Also, a woman tipped the police that the Pardues had been experimenting with explosives at their house. The cops went out and made the ID and arrest.

John was later shot brandishing a sawed-off shotgun during an escape attempt. James spent five years in a mental hospital. After his release he was arrested for a bombless 1977 Colorado bank robbery and sent to prison for a long term.

Taken together, this book paints a fascinating picture of bank robbery and larceny as a career option: long periods of planning and waiting, punctuated with periods of intense effort. And for safe cracking, toss in a lengthy technical apprenticeship. Frankly, although interesting, the whole thing sounds suspiciously like work to me.

CHIEF

by Albert Seedman with Peter Hellman
(New York: Arthur Fields, 1974)

I have a theory that most high ranking New York City policemen, say lieutenant on up, are convinced that a book contract for their memoirs is a part of their retirement package. Judging from my collection, their farewell luncheons end with the honoree cornered by a pack of literary agents in a feeding frenzy. The end result is that NY cops publish more books than the rest of the country's police forces combined. I must have at least a dozen: *Behind the Green Lights*, *Of Missing Men*, *New York Detective*, *You Got To Be Tough!* and so on.

Like most genres, there's the good, the bad, and the formula. A young, fresh-faced rookie pins on his shield. Although surrounded by corruption and graft, he refuses to partake, and climbs unsullied up through the ranks, riding a wave of reform. By the time he hangs up his harness, he's working in a modern, efficient, and thoroughly professional force, a far cry from the antiquated department of his youth.

The joke is that they've been using this same formula for the last 120 years. The same force praised for its modern methods by the gilded age cop retiring in 1900 is excoriated as a grafting, brawling bunch of political hacks by the turn of the century rookie looking back from "modern" 1930. But then some of us are cynical enough to shelve autobiographies in the fiction section. At the least, there's a great deal of self serving nonsense in these books.

The real reason to pick up these cop books to get first hand looks at crimes that are famous, or just should be. And this is where Seedman's book stands out. As a former Chief of Detectives, he isn't immune to blowing his own horn -- he softpedals the fact that he only headed the bureau for a year. But Seedman was mainly an administrator. When he writes about the crimes he worked on, it's about the men under him doing the real work. He isn't out to paint himself as a hero, which makes the dozen cases he describes read more like good true crime from an inside perspective. If you want cop anecdotes and atmosphere, stick to Wambaugh.

Several cases, although pleasant reading, are comparatively dull -- routine cop killings, deservedly forgotten murders and such. But several excellent cases of the '60s are included, many of which have received little, if any attention in other books.

This book is worth owning for the chapter on the Kitty Genovese case alone. It may be longer than *38 Witnesses*, the only book on the case. It's infinitely better. Seedman's account is brisk and loaded with little known facts, about both Kitty and killer Winston Mosley. Mosley is fleshed out as one weird guy who calmly described killing Kitty and another woman, along with a grab bag of rapes, assaults and burglaries, to the cops over coffee and hamburgers. As for Kitty, she was a lesbian working as a cocktail waitress in a straight bar. The night she was killed, she was, of all things, returning from a date with a man and wearing a pair of falsies. At first the cops suspected a lover's quarrel and had real fun questioning her dyke friends. (Witnesses couldn't tell if the attacker was a woman or a slightly built man). No great feats of detection went into solving the case. They caught Mosley stealing TVs in broad daylight and he started confessing to

progressively more and more violent crimes.

Seedman's other good reminisces come from the political violence of the '60s and '70s, starting with Sam Melville's little remembered, yet colorful series of eight bombs planted in buildings owned by various notable oppressors of the third world in Manhattan. No one was killed, but Seedman gets to reprint some great underground press clips. The far better known 1970 Greenwich Village Weatherman bomb factory blast gets a decent chapter, and answers the one question I've always had. Only two people, Kathy Boudin and Cathy Wilkerson, escaped the blast, and they were naked. Somehow, they managed to slip away and make contact with the underground. How? Even in New York, people would remember seeing two naked women. The answer? They begged some clothes from a kind hearted neighbor immediately after the blast. They remained on the lam for the next decade.

But far more interesting (and homicidal) in the political violence department were the ethnically inspired antics of the Jewish Defense League and the Black Liberation Army. The JDL launched a completely wild 1971 bombing campaign against the Russian trade mission. They only managed to kill one woman, ironically a Jew. But they had style. At one point, they planned to attack a Soviet motorcade with a remote control model plane loaded with explosives until saner heads prevailed. This case also provides an unusual up-close, in depth look at how cops usually nail people: informants. Contrary to popular belief, the world is loaded with finks.

The Black Liberation Army were to the Black Panthers as the Weathermen were to the SDS. They didn't want cute uniforms, publicity, or parties with Leonard Bernstein. They wanted action, and succeeded in making Huey, Bobby, and the rest of the boys look like a bunch of pussycats. Their entire raison d'etre was "Off the pigs". Between 1970 and 1972, they shot seven NYC cops, killing four. Each attack was followed with the traditional "All power to the people" communiques. They also injured a pair of cops in St. Louis, and killed a desk sergeant in a San Francisco police station. They funded operations through a series of hold-ups marked by impressive displays of firepower. The cops were tipped off on one job when a cabbie spotted a few BLA members heading into a social club on a job looking as though they'd just robbed a gun store.

Serial killer fans may be disappointed, but there's plenty of good stuff in here for anyone with the faintest interest in '60s political violence and other miscellaneous forms of mayhem. Books like this do much to atone for the numerous literary sins of the NYPD.

THINGS I LOVE

Buying obscure (and even not-so-obscure) crime books can be a real hit & miss proposition. I have shelves full of books by which I can only describe myself as being burned. Dust jackets and cover blurbs can only tell you so much. However, over the years, I have discovered several categories of sure hits and sure misses. You can't go wrong with these categories.

John Bartlow Martin was a great true crime writers for the *Saturday Evening Post*. His *Why Did They Kill?* (a Michigan JD killing) and *Butcher's Dozen* (collection) are both highly recommended. The later includes a good, long early account of the Cleveland Butcher and a fascinating chapter describing how he researched the pieces in this book. Take a pass, though, on *Overtaken by Events*, his memoirs of his stint as ambassador to the Dominican Republic.

Edward Radin was a real workhorse writer who rose up through the ranks from *True Detective* to the slicks to books and wound up winning two well-deserved Edgars for true crime. His titles include *12 Against Crime*, *Beyond the Law*, and *Lizzie Borden*. (In the last, he theorizes that the maid did it). You may agree or disagree with his conclusions (the latter title particularly pisses off Pearson fans), but I have never been disappointed by a Radin book.

True Detective Cases (aka *Detective: The Magazine of True Crime Cases*) may have only lasted a dozen or so issues in the early '50s, but I think it's the best true crime rag ever published. A dull looking Spivak digest like *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, it made up for the lack of grisly crime scene photos and splashy covers so dear to the hearts of true detective collectors with pure quality. Not hesitating to reprint, the contributor's list reads like a who's who of crime writing: Edgar Pearson, William Roughhead, Edmund Lustgarten, F. Tennyson Jesse, along with contemporary lights such as Anthony Boucher, Miriam Allen deFord, Lenore Glen Offord, Stuart Holbrook, Craig Rice and many, many more. This was the thinking man's true crime magazine.

The American Regional Murder Series could be the best series of true crime anthologies ever. Put out by Duell, Sloan, & Pearce in the '40s, each of the nine volumes focused on a specific city, ranging from the obvious (*New York Murders*) to the unlikely (*Charleston Murders*). San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, Detroit, Denver, and Cleveland rounded out the set. Each book covered between a dozen or so local cases, some famous, some obscure, but for the most part interesting and well done. For instance, *Denver Murders* includes the only account I know of about the "Spiderman of Denver". The writers were an unusual mix, ranging from nationally known crime and mystery writers (Erle Stanley Gardner, Anthony Boucher, Baynard Kendrick, Craig Rice, John Bartlow Martin) to local crime reporters and historians, with a few vintage contemporary accounts thrown in. The quality of the books is so high that they get raided regularly by anthologists. I have one collection of pre-WWII cases that was practically lifted wholesale from this set.

THINGS I HATE
(in no particular order)

Alan Hynd was a prolific crime writer of the '40s, '50s, and '60s, earning the title of "greatest crime reporter of them all" (according to his cover blurbs) by sheer volume. His quality sucks. Although the stuff he did for general circulation magazines was ok, his bread and butter work appears to have been done for *True*, the leader of the hairy-chested men's magazine market. They wanted sex. Hynd obliged. If there was a sex angle in a crime, he played it up mercilessly; if there wasn't, he stuck one in anyway. His writing is so much of the wink-wink nudge-nudge school that it will literally leave you with sore ribs. His articles were collected into cleverly-titled books like *Brutes, Beasts, and Human Fiends* and *Murder, Mayhem, and Mystery*.

J. Robert Nash looms over the crime field like a sinister, all powerful presence. He inherited Hynd's mantle as top crime guy with a barrage of crime books, "narrative encyclopedias", and "chronologies", culminating in the massive 7-volume *Encyclopedia of World Crime*. A decent writer, his books are spoiled by the odd combination of an arrogant, know-it-all attitude and an almost casual regard for the facts. They're loaded with errors. When I researched a case he described as "unsolved", I found his own sources contradict him. The trial was even covered in the *New York Times* where any moron can find it. Nash is also a passionate Dillinger fan who originated what John Goodman calls "the quaint... theory (that) the man who died in the alley wasn't Dillinger but a man who looked just like him."

Long Books are my #1 gripe about the genre today. There's nothing wrong with a weighty volume on a big case by a good writer, like *Helter Skelter* and *The Stranger Beside Me* (but not other Ann Rule titles). But too many writers seem to be getting paid by the pound, and shift their word processors into diarrhea mode to churn out crap like *Missing Beauty*. Invariably, these ok crimes are laden with such irrelevancies as the lawyer's family history (three generations minimum), endless pages of dull trial transcript, and bad fetishistic coverage of police procedure. Mark my words -- most crimes can be adequately covered in 10,000 words or less. The next 90,000 are strictly padding and bullshit.

Revisionism is my other big gripe about today's crime books. I theorize two causes: publishers want new angles on old cases to keep the marketing boys happy, and ever since Watergate, everyone who touch types thinks they're Woodward & Bernstein. I don't deny that innocent people get convicted; I'm just cynical about the journalistic methods these clowns use to find "the truth". They tend to ignore the prosecution, and uncritcally accept the defense. They generally rely heavily on testimony of eyewitnesses without considering credibility. Eyewitness testimony under penalty of perjury is unreliable enough; the ex post facto witnesses these guys dig up are even worse -- most of them are absent-minded, addled or crazy. All budding crime historians are directed to read Borchard's *Convicting the Innocent* and remember that it cuts both ways.

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